

APRIL 1932

RECKLESS RALPH'S

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

OFFICIAL ORGAN HAPPY HOURS BROTHERHOOD

(Reprint)

The original of this issue featured the front page illustration of BOYS OF ENGLAND, beneath which appeared the following:

"THE CLASSIC ENGLISH OLD BOY'S BOOK

Front cover page of Boys of England for Aug. 23, 1873. The first number of this classic Old Boy's Book appeared Nov. 27, 1866, and the last number, 1702, was dated June 30, 1899- a grand run of sixty-six volumes of six months each. It was the masterpiece publication of Mr. Edwin J. Brett. Brett was a wood engraver in his early days, partner of E. Landell, one of the truly great engraving craftsmen of the middle nineteenth century, and this experience counted when he went out on his own in the publishing business."

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THE DIME NOVEL.

Its place in American Literature.

By Ralph F. Adimare

II

The Pre-Dime Novel Era (1830-1860)

First Section

Important Figures who contributed to the
Dime Novel. (Concluded)

The high-water mark in the quantity of novels written in this era, was reached by Sylvanus Cobb, Jr. (1823-1887). He wrote, within thirty-five years of active work, over 200 novels and nearly 500 short stories, sketches and articles. He started writing in 1850 for Flag of Our Union, whose editor, Maturin

M. Ballou, suggested that he use pseudonyms to his numerous serials. This was the initial use of various nom de plumes by an American author.

Due to Cobb's rapid success in Boston, Richard Bonner, the successful publisher of the New York Ledger, lured him to New York in 1856. Bonner celebrated Cobb's arrival by spending \$20,000 advertising the first story "The Gunmaker of Moscow", a sensational amount for those days. His fame was secure and none other than Ralph Waldo Emerson, praised his works.*

The various pseudonyms used by Cobb, were; Austin C. Burdick, Amos Winslow, Jr., Charles Castleton, and Walter B. Dunlap. Nearly all his novels were historical and included such famous works as "The Gunmaker of Moscow"- "The King's Talisman"- "Roderic of Kildare"- "The Bravo's Secret"- "The Caliph of Bagdad"- "The Fortunes of Conrad"- "The Council of Ten"- "The Royal Outlaw"- "The Shadow of the Guillotine", and many others. Altho he overlapped into the 1870's and 1880's, his work was not influenced by the Transition Period, (1860-1875).

Another writer sponsored by Flag of Our Union, was Dr. John Hovey Robinson. While not as prolific as Cobb, his influence was felt and his tales were re-printed by Beadle and Adams, when they appeared on the scene. His stories were mainly about the West, among which were: "Redpath the Avenger"- "The Texan Bravo"- "Kosato, the Blackfoot Avenger"- "The Lone Star"- "Mountain Max"- and "Ben Brion, the Trapper Captain."

(* See "Memoir of Sylvanus Cobb, Jr." by Ella W. Cobb.) (Copyright, 1932 by Ralph F. Adimare)

A study of the novel before 1860, leads to the inevitable conclusion, that it lacked

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virility.

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While the plots were based on strong manly adventure, nevertheless, their execution was bad. A reading of most of the stories convinces that they were dull affairs at the most and might have been fairy tales, for all the punch they contained. The fact, and this occurred very often, of having the hero, or some important character get into the most terrible difficulties, and near death, in every other chapter, is not enough. Nor is it enough to describe in detail, the death agonies of a score of Indians. This does not constitute story-telling. It is more subtle than that. As an example of story-telling of the highest kind, we will not bring in a Choice Dime Novel at this stage. Let us mention "Anderson's Fairy Tales". For thrilling stories, you would have far to go, to find such absorbing tales, as "The Ugly Duckling" and "The Tin Soldier", yet in these gems, there is not a single killing. They are as simple as can be, but withal, retain a story value. They are written for children, but no adult may overlook them, without losing something.

A comparison between Anderson, one of the precious highlights of literature, and these pre-Dime Novelists, may strike you as funny, but it is not stretching it a bit. The difference between Anderson and the dime novelist who, as we shall show, advanced the romantic story, to the highest pitch, was one of mood. Anderson wrote of life as it should be; took for his tools, only the very gentlest creatures and welded them into stories of high artistic merit. On the other hand, the dime novelist, as well as his predecessor, wrote of Romance, or life as it should be, and unfortunately is not, in a more vigorous, manly tone.

But the end of both was the same. It was that life should be more beautiful, happier than it is.

In the whole range of our literature before 1860, you cannot find a single work, of which you might breathlessly exclaim, "Here is a wonderful romance !" They were all dull and at times reach stupidity, undreamed of. Cooper may not be excluded from this fault, even tho he is allegedly read today. They were all tarred with the same stick--Conventionalism. Whenever an English book was smuggled in, these writers read it avidly, and then proceeded to copy it, not forgetting of course, to omit English scenes and characters.*

(* "In a country....where hardly one thought ever springs up in an American brain, that has not been filtered into it from the mass of ideas coming in with every batch of pirated editions of English publications." -Page 189, "Episodes of my Second Life" by Antonio Gallenga..Gallenga's opinion is that "political emancipation had riveted and aggravated the fetters of Intellectual dependence." In other words, democracy tends to destroy art and literature. This is an unusual slant on the problems that beset the artist in America before Whitman appeared. This should be worth looking into.)

And no story could be even attempted unless it carried out to the letter, each and every fault contained in the conventional English novel. Ingraham, Cobb, Cooper, Herbert, Judson, and any of the others, wrote alike. There was nothing to distinguish one from the other, except perhaps, that one was more boring than the other.

This was the conventional period, that is, a novel had to contain precise English,

start without any fancy fireworks, pause at every moment to describe any object accurately, even tho in doing so, it hold up action and destroyed the story content, guarded itself against any enthusiasm, and was as pompous as possible. At times these faults were carried to laughable lengths. The conventional novel of the period started thus: "On the great plain of Texas, about a hundred miles southward from the old Spanish town of San Antonio de Bajar, a town now happily joined to the United States, which is as it should be, the noonday sun shed his beams on the river, from a sky of cerulean brightness. On this day when our tale begins, and directly after the scorching sun had passed the meridian, a slight breath of air was perceptible, tho very barely, in the slight wave of the reeds that clustered the banks of the smooth flowing stream. Did this slight disturbance of nature portend a warning of ill omen to come upon those inanimate objects that stood around in the vicinity of the river? No-far in the distant horizon, that human eye could barely distinguish, appeared a group of objects, but little in unison with the landscape around them, so little in fact, that they might be mistaken for shrubs that grew so plentiful in that desolate region. Since they betokened the presence of human beings, which if an Indian had been there, clear of eye, would have easily discerned, in a spot where there was no sign of human habitation and the stillness of the air was broken by the coughing of frogs, it was a surprise."

The story of that period was obvious, it contained no subtlety-no artistry. The writers had no imagination and there works were written without any general purpose. It contained no grand sweep as was evidenced in the Dime Novel that followed on its heels.

In all cases, the writers were more content to living life vigorously and dangerously. But these experiences they were unable to weave into their stories. Herbert, Judson, and most of the others--like the famous Cooper for example, were always in difficulties, either shooting someone, or challenging their opponents to a duel. They lived very strongly, but wrote very feebly. They were bound in conventional shackles that even their fiery and tempestuous natures were unable to cope with, as artists.

Thus it was not until that supreme American, Whitman, came along, with his dynamite, in the form of "Leaves of Grass", 1855, to shatter forever, the iron-bound conventions that existed then, that the true flower of American literature blossomed forth to open the way for the dime novelist.

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POLICE GAZETTE PASSES...

The old Police Gazette suspended publication recently. Old-timers who took in their boys' story papers in the late 1870's and early 1880's can remember this lurid sheet in its heyday, when it was the highlight on the counter on which the red-hot weeklies were displayed in the Main Street Book & News Emporium, and when it was the barber shop lure in their early shaving days. It dates back to 1845, but it was in 1873 that Richard K. Fox bought it and made it the national pink periodical of the gaslit era.

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THE GOLDEN AGE OF ENGLISH BOYS' LITERATURE.

A Bibliographical Review of 20 Years Progress--1862-1882.... Edited by Wm. J. Bonners, The Old-timer and Reader--and World's authority on Serial Story Papers.

(Third Installment)

The emphatic success achieved by the Boys of England soon brought a rival into the field. This was the Young Englishman, conducted by Wm. Emmett Laurence, and imitating very closely, its successful predecessor. This also became very popular with the boys.

On Jan. 29, 1868, the proprietor of the Boys of England started a "companion journal" called the Young Men of Great Britain, and conducted by Vane Ireton St. John, who wrote the leading story, "The Night Guard, or, The Secret of the Five Masks".

The rival publication, the Young Englishman straightway issued its "companion journal, the Young Gentlemen of Britain, in which W. Stephen Hayward's story, "The Mutiny of the Thunder", first appeared.

Thus, there were four weekly journals for boys being published simultaneously, all being for the time, successful.

Then, Charles Stevens, parting from Mr. E. J. Brett and The Boys of England, started the Boys Book of Romance, which, at any rate, so far as illustrations were concerned, was far superior to anything yet attempted--such famous artists as John Proctor, Matt Morgan, and E. Wagner being engaged on its staff. But this was "too good" to last, and after six or seven months existence, it was numbered with the past.

Some time after this, there was a division in the camp concerned in the Young Englishman and the Young Gentlemen of Britain. The latter suddenly ceased to appear, and the Sons of Britannia and the Young Briton appeared, the latter at the commencement, a halfpenny--the first attempt to produce a boys's paper at such a price. Both were highly successful, "The Idol's Eye" by W. Stephen Hayward, being the most attractive feature of the Sons of Britannia.

On Nov.1,1862, a more ambitious undertaking was commenced by the publication of the Gentlemen's Journal, a very excellent and high-toned illustrated weekly paper for boys young men. It was published by Harrison, and conducted by Geo.Frederick Pardon (Capt. Crawley), but it was almost too good for the period at which it was produced, and, despite liberal gifts of gorgeous colored plates, it did not achieve the success it deserved. At length, after six volumes had been published, at a great sacrifice on the part of the proprietors, the struggling journal was crushed out.

Meanwhile, the publications of E.J.Brett and the Emmetts, continued their careers of popularity. The famous Jack Harkaway stories by Bracebridge Hemyng being the chief success of the former, and "Tom Wildrake's Schooldays" by Geo.Emmott, of the latter publisher.

Mr.Brett has since started two other papers, Our Boys Journal and Boys' Sunday Reader, the latter after a short period, being rechristened, the Boys Weekly Reader.

In 1875, Messrs.Bick, the publishers of Bow Bells, started a boys' paper entitled, the Boys Herald, conducted, we believe, by G.F. Pardon. Percy B.St.John wrote many stories for this publication, which had a short existence.

In 1875, the Boys Standard appeared and is still being published. (This is written as of 1882).

The passing of the elementary education acts of 1870, and the consequent raising of the level of education among the masses, soon began to show its effect by the decline and eventual disappearance of many of these journals, which, even in their hours of success, began to decay, as the demand grew

more evident that something better was required to supply the wants of the rising generation.

(To be continued)

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BOYS AND GIRLS OF AMERICA.

George Munro's Girls and Boys of America was launched Sept. 27, 1873. Only girls and boys, sixtyfive to seventyfive years young, could have taken it in. It was plainly an attempt to grab off a little of the circulation of Frank Leslie's Boys and Girls Weekly, started in 1866. Leslie's paper was about nine by thirteen inches, and Munro made his sheet about ten by fourteen inches, boasting that his paper "is a larger and more popular style of paper for young readers, than has ever before been published in this country." Munro anticipated by several years, the big dreadful juvenile broadsides of the later 1870's and 1880's.

Among the crackerjack stories which appeared in the early numbers, were "Steps in the Ladder, or, Ragged Tom's Triumph" by Samuel W. Pearce; "The Three Little Crusoes of Silver Island", by Louis Herbert; "Light-Hearted Harry, or, The Fortunes of a N.Y. Newsboy" by Geo. G. Small; and "Kitty Clem, or, Heirless and Beggard" by the famous M. Quad. "Robinson Crusoe" and "Alice in Wonderland" were featured as serials, and the superior Tim Pippin stories - "Giant-Land" - "King Pippin" - Etc., were reprinted from the English Young Folks Weekly Budget.

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THE CLAYTON CORRAL..

Howdy, brothers ! Ride right up and peel the leather off those sweating broncs. 'Scuse me while I cut a wad of this "Battleax" for my cheek; it helps to lubricate the talking

apparatus, the a fellow don't need anything extra to keep his enthusiasm oiled, when Making conversation about the CLAYTON MAGAZINES. Their swell fare in those magazines is enough to make your mouth water. If you haven't the habit, it sure is one worth forming. Got to have mental food as well as food for the inner man, and twenty cents, the price of any one of CLAYTON'S MAGAZINES is mighty little to pay for the amount of recreation a fellow get from reading an issue, selecting whatever type of story appeals to his individual taste; romantic Western-action Western-Detective-or Science Fiction.

Look for the CLAYTON STANDARD-a blue triangle with white letters in the upper left-hand corner of the front cover. When you buy a magazine wearing this brand, you're getting the best of it's kind. The covers are outstanding, too in any newstand's array. But if you don't see them, ask for 'em!

Try Ace-High Magazine---Cowboy Stories--Ranch Romances--Rangeland Love Story--Western Love Stories--Western Adventures--Clues--All Star Detective Stories--Strange Tales--or Astounding Stories.

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ENGLISH OLD-TIMER PASSES.

Mr. G. Meridith, our Folkstone, England correspondent informs us that Mr. J. J. Wilson, the Liverpool collector and dealer, died Feb. 21st. He had favored us with notes for several interesting articles on Old Boys' Books and Penny Dreadfuls. We shall take great pleasure in getting this material in shape for early publication, as a memorial to this old-timer, who was the "power" behind the Old Boys' Book Club, established in 1880.